Unscripted Dreams - Dr. Charles Rix on Creativity and Reinvention

Airdate: September 21, 2025

Guest: Dr. Charles Rix

Resources: New York listeners should check out the Boo Festival at Players' Theater October 9-12, 2025 located at 115 Macdougal St, New York, NY 10012. Dr. Rix's play, *Woo Woo*, will be one of those featured.

Charles Rix: 0:30

Working within a context where there's a whole lot of expectations on what you look like, what you sound like, what you talk like, what your views are, I found myself always having to do a lot of editing. Mostly for the sake of being sure I communicated well. But that's a lot of editing. And one of the things I realized, when you start thinking, I know what I'm supposed to say here, and I know what everybody else wants to hear, and you do that enough, then you forget what you actually think. So I realized that needed attention, I needed to fix that.

David Lowry: 1:04

Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, where we explore the art of living well, especially in the second half of life. That was Charles Rix our guest today on the show. I'm David Lowry here with my co-host Don Drew, and today we're going to bring you a story that's equal parts bold, inspiring, and I think very deeply human. Hey Don, how are you doing?

Don Drew: 1:25

David, I'm doing great, and it's an absolute pleasure to introduce our good friend, Dr. Charles Rix. A long time college professor who made a remarkable pivot. After years of teaching and mentoring students, Charles felt a stirring, a desire to pursue something new, something creative. So he enrolled in a Master's program in playwriting, packed up his life in Oklahoma, and moved to New York City to follow his passion. Now Charles is not only teaching again in a new role, but he is also seeing early success as a playwright. His story is a testament to the power of reinvention, the courage to listen to your inner voice, and the joy of discovering new purpose later in life. Dr. Charles Rix welcome to Peaceful Life Radio.

Charles Rix: 2:06

Thank you for having me.

David Lowry: 2:07

Charles, it's really good to see you and we have so many questions we wanna ask you today because before you moved to New York City you had a respected career in academia and a life as a scholar and a professional in biblical studies. So let's lay a little bit of a foundation and tell everyone what your life was like and what you were doing and some of your experiences before you decided to step away from a lot of this.

Charles Rix: 2:32

Well, I had a full-time teaching job and of course on top of that I was serving as the dean of Bible and Humanities for part of that time. So I was busy. I was doing a lot to support students and to be sure that all of my administrative abilities were taken care of. And one of the things I really enjoyed during that time was travel, because I did the Vienna Study Abroad program a number of times. So, I had an active life of life and travel and it was really put together I think pretty well. But I realized that I wasn't getting any younger, and that was mainly during COVID when I think a lot of us had kind of a reset. Like, what is happening with us? But the thing I was really missing was a lot of creative activity. There is a lot of creative work that is done in academia. There's a lot of creative work that's done in research and writing and teaching and being with students. I mean, a lot of that is creative. But I kind of got to the point where, for me, I needed to explore a very different kind of creativity. One that, I had wanted to pursue for a long time and had never really done it. And so I reached that point of thinking, You know, I'm going to step out. I'm gonna try something new. And I'd always wanted to write plays. And this goes back to when I was little. My earliest memories of doing creative things were actually writing little scripts and things like that. I've always loved theater. When I was in Oklahoma, I went to as many plays and theater as I could do. But I kind of got tired watching it. I thought, I wanna do it. I don't wanna just watch it. So during COVID, when I was sitting around thinking, Okay, what is coming next? I realized this was the time to take action and do something about it. And about 10 years ago I worked with a professor in New Jersey where I taught before coming to Oklahoma, who went through something similar, except she wanted to be a novelist. And she found this program through Spalding University that was a low residency creative

writing program. She did that to become a novelist and a writer and I thought that's actually pretty cool. So one day I called up that school, told them my story, and said, what do I need to do to become a playwright? Tell me what I need to do. They said, well, what you need to do is give us 25 pages of your best original script and we'll see. Well, I never written a script, I had no idea exactly what kind of format, but I thought, well, okay, 25 pages, I can produce 25 pages of something. So I wrote 25 pages and sent it in and they called me back and said This is great, you need to come join the program. And so I did, and I was in the program within a month. And it was one of the best things I have ever done.

Don Drew: 5:49

Charles, you mentioned the draw of creativity, but what about questions of practicality, things like finances, age, professional reputation? How did they play into your decision to make this move?

Charles Rix: 6:02

Well, sometimes I ask people, do you want the truth or a quick lie?

David Lowry: 6:05

We want the quick lie followed by the truth.

Charles Rix: 6:08

The quick lie is that, I spent many, many sleepless nights, wondering how in the world that this was impossible. I'm too old. All of this is for younger people. I'm not as good as I think I am. New York is expensive. I mean, I could have talked myself out of it really quickly. But honestly, and maybe I should have thought about it more, I really wasn't thinking about that. I thought, You know what, I'm just gonna do it and see what happens. If I think about it, I won't do it. So I just need to do it. And then, if I find out it's not practical or it's too expensive or nobody thinks I can write, then okay. Nobody said that. Although I will say, again, I told my kids about this and they said, if you don't do it, we're coming down to Oklahoma and we're gonna drive you up here. Yeah. I'm just gonna do it. It's time. In terms of a tipping point, everything was going really well. I wasn't upset, angry, or mad or, wanting

to quit. It was actually the opposite. I didn't have a reason to do it other than I'm just not getting any younger and I really wanna do this. And so I've got to find a way to do it.

Don Drew: 7:17

You mentioned having an interest in being a play writer at a very young age was there a particular play or performance that sparked your passion when you were young?

Charles Rix: 7:25

When I was 11 we lived in New York City for a while. My dad had an assignment in the city, and so we moved here during a summer and that was when I saw my first Broadway play. They took me to Radio City and it was the musical back when Angela Lansbury was really young and this was just great. And I thought, I wanna do this. I thought, this would be a fun thing to do. I didn't have any concept of that other than I enjoyed it.

Don Drew: 7:54

I just wanna mention that Charles, David, and I have known each other for a long time. We've taught and have a history together. I remember when you told me you were going to start a master's program in playwriting. What was that experience like for you?

Charles Rix: 8:07

Well, the one thing that gave me confidence to do it was because in the arts, and not so much in things like dance, where the age of the body really is important, but in things like creative writing, people of all ages do this. You have people of all different ages in there. So I really wasn't intimidated so much by that. The thing that really struck me was how much I was going to have to write every single day in the program. I was not used to doing that. I had to make time to do it. And with everything else I had to do, it took some doing to change the rhythm of my life so that I could have the time to produce the amount of work I needed to produce. It was scary. I'm not gonna say it wasn't scary. It was scary to think about doing something completely creative. I mean, it's completely you. You're kind of putting yourself out there and you don't know whether it's gonna work or whether it's not gonna work. So you either do it or you don't. And to do it, you have to have the courage to do it and be okay with, if it doesn't work, then it doesn't work.

David Lowry: 9:19

I think that as we get older, you sort of have a freedom because of all the years you've lived and your experiences I would think.

Charles Rix: 9:26

That's right, that's right. I learned this from all those years doing piano and performing and things like this is that you don't ever try to be great, right? You touch base with what it is you want to say artistically. What do I have to say to the world and what's the best way to get that out there? And then you do your best to be yourself and put that out there. And it's that journey that I think later in life you've got so much to draw on. I realized I had a lot of experience to draw on. So really what was important to me was to get all of that stuff out of me and onto paper and going back to school, that part of it was the skills to do that. This is another like, raw truth. Touch base with what you're not okay with, and write from that. I mean, you've lived long enough to see things go well in the world. You've lived long enough to see things not go right, to see things you wanna change. So touch base with that and write from there. That's part of my creative process. This is dramatic writing, I write from places of identity struggles, justice struggles, seeing things not work out. How do I show the complexity of the way life can be in the face of everyone wanting simplicity. How do I liberate myself enough to actually say what I wanna say? And one of the most rewarding things about this whole process is I have learned how to be a much freer person.'cause I've spent a lot of my life editing myself.

David Lowry: 11:09

That's a wonderful segue to a question I had for you, Charles, and that was what have you learned about yourself through this journey that you didn't expect? You found some surprises I think.

Charles Rix: 11:21

I'll sit down to write something and now I can catch myself when I start to write in an edited way. It's like, no, don't do that. Get it on paper the way it comes out. And then see, how it works.

Don Drew: 11:33

So what does this routine look like for you, this writing routine? Do you have rituals or habits or special places you go? How do you stay inspired throughout all this process?

Charles Rix: 11:43

I write generatively and creatively every day generally in the morning. And if I'm going to edit it, I do that in the evening. So when I'm fresh in the morning, I will sit down and I'll write however many pages. And if any of that strikes me, then I'll edit it. The other thing I've learned in this process, thanks to some very, very good mentors that I have, is that you have to write a lot every day to actually get to what you wanna say. So it's the process of writing that helps you get down deep. Like the other day there's two characters I was really interested in developing and so I wrote 40 pages of dialogue between these two. And it wasn't until I was getting to the very end that it's like, oh, okay, I know what's supposed to happen here. Right? So you get rid of those 40 pages and you start over, right? But you're not starting over, you're starting from a place of knowledge, because as a writer, particularly for theater, you have to be willing as the writer for your characters to surprise you and go places that you didn't think they would go. You actually follow them and that's where the play actually takes off. If I try to control the characters too much it doesn't hardly ever work.

David Lowry: 12:57

Charles, earlier in the program you were talking about self editing. You learned that you had edited yourself almost where people didn't know you as an authentic person. I think that's a problem common with so many people in the second half of life. Any advice on how we might go about taking those edits off without totally alienating or overdoing it, but at the same time becoming more real about who we are?

Charles Rix: 13:21

Yes and the first is to be honest with yourself for example, about what you really want to say so that you know what that is. So a simple example, which is was a real example for me, was what I call food honesty. When somebody will say, Oh, I wanna have you over for dinner and this is what I'm thinking about having. So they name off what they're gonna be

fixing for dinner and you don't like any of it, right? Well, for a long time I would just, out of politeness not say anything and then dread it, and the whole thing just was not a good time until I realized, Well, I can say something about this. I have agency, I can do that. And so I just thought from now on, if somebody says something like that, I'm going to say, Well, that sounds really good, but I have kind of trouble with this or that food. So maybe can we do something else? Or if somebody would say, have a particular opinion, that really started to get my blood pressure going up, I would just sit there and take it. And I don't have to. I think I could say, I'm coming from a different place on that, but if, if you wanna tell me what you think, fine. But at least I said something right.

David Lowry: 14:30

I hear you say, start being a little more honest about the small things to get started.

Don Drew: 14:36

So you've been in New York now for what, two years? What's the reception been like so far? What kind of a response have they been giving you?

Charles Rix: 14:43

Well, I think the thing that was really encouraging was that the first play I had accepted into a festival I basically outlined it on the back of a napkin at a diner, and it was the first thing I ever submitted without any thought that it would get chosen, but it did. And it was through that entry point and doing the first one that I learned how big that world is and how you make connections and know what kinds of things people are writing and I had to learn the world. At least the world up here. And the reception's been good. My fifth short play will be October 9th through the 12th. I've done five of those, and then through that process found a director, found actors. I mean, you just sort of building your world. But for just having been here three years, I mean, I've had at least one play a year, which I think it's pretty good. It's not something that makes you any money necessarily, but that was never the point. The point was just to do something I really, really love and do it the best I can. And it falls where it falls.

David Lowry: 15:50

What advice would you give to someone over 50 who feels this creative calling but really isn't so sure about how to begin?

Charles Rix: 15:59

I would say the most important thing is to go for it somehow. Realize that if you want to do something different you want to do it for a reason and don't be afraid of that reason. Surround yourself with people who are for you and will support you. Then just take one little step at a time. Keep moving towards what you wanna do. I have done things like this in the past. Before I moved to Oklahoma I thought, I really wanna learn how to do standup comedy. I really wanna learn how to do that. I had no idea. I mean, it's really hard. It's very hard to try to be funny. It's really difficult to try to do that. But I mean, that was back when we had Yellow Pages, right? So I just looked in the Yellow Pages, Comedy Club called them up, Hey, do you do this? Do you teach people that don't know anything how to do something? And that's the kind of start you have to do. If you wanna do something just pick up the phone and call somebody. Just tap it into chat, GPT, or Google or get a phone number or go down and just start. Don't overthink. Just do it, and let the path unfold.

Don Drew: 17:07

How do you define success now compared to earlier in your career??

Charles Rix: 17:11

I'll say it graphically, looking myself in the mirror and asking the question, Charles, do you enjoy this? There's a lot of times in the past it would be no. You do it to build a career, to climb the ladder maybe a little bit. You do it to make money. You do it for all kinds of reasons. And I think that the cool thing about getting older is that you know more about what that's like than you did when you were younger. When you're younger, it's like hope springs eternal, You can do something you absolutely hate, and there's this magic out there that's supposed to happen where it all of a sudden turns into something good. And it might, but it usually doesn't. So my definition of success is, am I enjoying it in the moment? Do I like doing this? Is it life giving? Is it authenticating? Is this something I'm excited to tell people about?

David Lowry: 17:56

My wife calls it, does it give me a reason to put my feet on the floor after I've slept all night?

Charles Rix: 18:03

Yeah, exactly. Do I look forward to it? And if I don't, then don't do it.

Don Drew: 18:09

And then there's the role of community as well. How has community been sustaining the new path you've chosen??

Charles Rix: 18:14

I have found is that the community itself is really supportive. In an artistic community, hopefully you're always learning from what other people do. That's one of the big things. Like, in my last play, I had seven really amazing actors who gave their time to do my stuff. So as I have opportunity, I go to other things they do, right? I support them, and in supporting them I meet all of their friends, I meet their community and it's pretty much like anything else. But again, with the community building, it's the same question about, am I getting something out of it? It sounds really self-serving, but you can't give from an empty bucket. You have to fill yourself up. If you're always giving, giving, giving, giving, giving, and giving, and giving some more, then there's nothing left.

David Lowry: 19:03

Charles, this has really been inspirational to me. It sounds like you have a lot going on. Tell us what's coming up for you? What's new for you? Where are you headed with all of this?

Charles Rix: 19:12

Well I have a full length play, which had its first professional reading here in New York last October, and I'm in the process of making revisions to that and mounting a production of it hopefully in the spring of 26. That's the next big thing. The other big thing that I'm doing this fall is I'm finding ways to merge my theatrical knowledge with my teaching at seminary using, playwriting theory as a way of illustrating theological concepts. So I'm doing some

special classes. I've got some theater people coming in to actually do workshops with some of my students. So the next big thing is putting those two worlds together.

David Lowry: 19:55

Yeah. And we want you to promote your play coming up in October.

Charles Rix: 19:58

The October play is a short play at the New York Short Play Festival that happens in October called The Boo Festival. And my play is about paranormal activity. Is it real or not? October 9th through the 12th at the Players Theater in the West Village in New York City.

David Lowry: 20:19

Charles, thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. Your journey is a powerful reminder that it's never too late to listen to that inner voice or take a leap or create something meaningful in your life. And for our listeners, if you've been sitting on a dream or wondering if it's too late, let Charles story inspire you. The second half of life isn't just about reflection, it's about reinvention as well. And as always, we wanna thank you for tuning into Peaceful Life Radio. We'll be back soon with more stories to inspire your journey towards a peaceful, purposeful life.